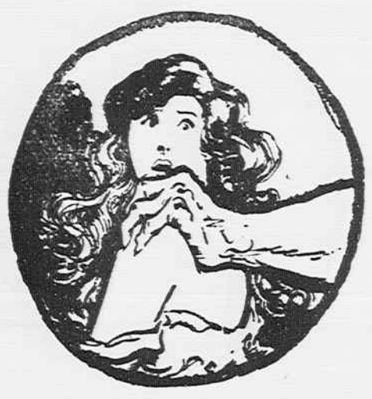

The Strange Case of MARY PAGE

The Great McClure Mystery Story, Written by FREDERICK LEWIS In Collaboration With JOHN T. M'INTYRE, Author of the Ashton Kirk Detective Stories. *Read the Story and See the Essanay Moving Pictures*

HER FATHER'S DEATH

SYNOPSIS.

Mary Page, actress, is accused of the murder of James Pollock and is defended by her lover, Philip Langdon. Pollock was intoxicated. Shale, a crook and tool of Pollock, was on the fire escape watching for Langdon. At Mary's trial she admits she had the revolver. Her maid testifies that Mary threatened Pollock with it previously, and Mary's leading man implicates Langdon. Mary's escape after the murder is a mystery. Brandon tells of a strange hand print on Mary's shoulder. Further evidence shows that horror of drink produces temporary insanity in Mary. The defense is "repressed psychosis."

PSYCHOLOGISTS and those scientists who study the human brain declare that the focus of consciousness is dual, and that unless the sub-conscious mind supplements the conscious concentration, the attention is easily diverted. Thus it was that Mary Page, sitting in the

Langdon and Mary Page.

prisoner's dock with the Damoclean sword of justice above her, was now unconscious of the crowd in the court-room.

Mind and soul were alike concentrated upon Langdon and upon the slow building of the evidence that was to free her from the charge of having murdered James Pollock.

A tumult of old memories was surging about her, as witness after witness told of the tragedy of a year before; (a tragedy that had so grim a sequel in the present.) and yet there were strange nightmarish blanks in those memories—spaces where fact had to give place to imagination, and during which she had hung in the nullity of uncounted moments, merging like a person under ether to momentary pain-scared consciousness, only to sink whirling back into oblivion. And it was of these moments of which Mary herself knew only by hearsay that the witnesses were now testifying.

Mary did not realize the subtlety with which Langdon was calling these witnesses. In fact, it was doubtful if any of those in the court-room except perhaps the Prosecutor and the Judge, appreciated the skill with which he brought out each detail in its turn.

In pursuance of his method of bringing out events as they had happened he had already, at a "bar side conference," asked permission to recall his witnesses a second or even a third time. Thus it came as a surprise only to the spectators when Mrs. Page again took her place in the witness-box.

"Mrs. Page, you told us yesterday of how your daughter, struggling with her drunken father, was struck by him and fled screaming from the house. Will you tell the court, please, what followed that flight? Did you go after her or remain at home?"

"It was impossible for me to follow as quickly as Mr. Langdon did," she said quietly, glancing toward the Judge. "So I stood at the gate waiting, feeling sure that it would only be a very few minutes before he would return with my poor, half-crazed girl.

"I went back as far as the window. It was very cold and I wanted to get a wrap, but I—I—was afraid of my husband. I saw him sitting by the table still drinking. At last, however, he fell over onto the couch asleep, and I went in and got wraps and blankets, thinking to start out myself in search of Mary. As I came out of the cottage I saw Mr. Pollock drive up in his motor. He said, 'My God, she'll die out there in the cold. They must be a lot of idiots not to have found her in this time.' Then he grabbed the other man by the arm and said, 'Get in the car and show me how to reach the place where the searching party is. I'll find Mary—I promise you that.'"

"Did he offer to take you with him?"

"Yes, but I felt that I must stay at home in case—in case—they brought her back, or she wandered back of her own accord."

"Did you go into the house after they had left?" Langdon's voice was very gentle now, and Mrs. Page smiled at him, a smile that was far sadder than tears as she said:

"No—I wrapped myself up and sat on the steps. I—I felt nearer to Mary out under the stars."

"That is all, Mrs. Page."

But now the District Attorney was on his feet holding up an arresting hand.

"Mrs. Page," he said harshly, one lean finger thrust towards her menacingly, "if your husband struck your daughter and injured her so terribly that she temporarily lost her reason, why doesn't she carry a scar?"

"Why, she does." There was a note of surprise in the quick answer, and Mary's fingers tightened ever so little about the rail in front of her.

"Is it possible to show the court that scar?" There was a sneer in the voice; a sneer born of the realization that something must be done to stem the great tide of sympathy for Mary, and cast disparagement upon this story from the past. But his request was a boomerang, for when Mary, trembling a little, took her place before the court and, lifting the soft hair from her forehead, showed the great livid mark of a hideous scar, the murmuring of compassion that swept through the room found a mute echo on the Bench itself, and the Prosecutor, discomfited, swung curtly away and dropped into his seat as Langdon called the next witness.

"John Alexander MacPherson!"

"Mr. MacPherson, you have told of seeing Miss Page running through the wood and of my finding her. Will you tell us now, please, whether you saw me again on that night and under what circumstances."

"I saw Mr. Langdon again on that nicht wi'in the hour. I had nae more than reachit home and were tellin' my gude wife of the evenin' when there coom a knock at the door. I opened it, and there stude Mr. Langdon. He was all in a feery farry—not to say commotion, and his face were white. Beyant him I cude see twa or three other men—all excited like."

"Did you recognize them?"

"Aye, there were men from the town—I had seen them often, and taken a wee drappie wie them at the hotel come Saturday nicht. But it were Mr. Langdon who spoke. 'Have you seen Miss Page,' he cried, catching at my sleeve. 'We are looking for her.' 'Div you mean tae say you've lostit her again?' I asked; and he said, 'Yes. I sat doon to rest a bit and I must have lost consciousness. When I came to, she was gone.'"

"Did you go with any of the three men?"

"Havers, no, man! I came back for my cap and coat, and I got to the door

"I—I felt nearer to Mary out under the stars."

just in time tae save Mr. Langdon from a bad fall, for he would hae gaen over in a heap if I hadna caught him. My gude wife and I took him in the house, and when he was revived a bit I was for leavin' him, but he wouldna stay. He said, 'I must find Mary mysel'—it was I lost her the second time.' So we went oot together."

"How long was it before you got a trace of her?" Langdon's voice was toneless, but his eyes were alight with fire as he pictured to himself that strange night hunt for the slender girl he loved. The occasional shouts of the other searchers; the flash of a lantern; the heavy shadows and vividly white snow; the cold that stung his face and hands and the aching weariness that numbed his muscles. It had been like a nightmare to him, a dream that set his head to throbbing, and in which the only real thing was the stalwart bulk of MacPherson encouraging him forward—and then—the little shoe! He roused himself with a start, realizing that the Scotchman was answering his question.

"It might hae been fifteen minutes—mayhap more, when we coom to her little footprints in the snow. Then—" he paused a moment and his voice softened, "we found her wee slipper in a snow bank. A bit further we found t'other one—and the snow began tae be flecked wi' draps of blood. But I should say it was mair than half an hour before we coom upon the lassie hersel', lying in a faint like."

"Was she conscious?"

"Nae, and we could na bring her to, so we wrappit her in oor coats and took her back to the gude wife."

"Will you tell us please in what condition Miss Page was when I—when you—arrived at your house with her?"

MacPherson frowned at the memory and a deeper note crept into his tones as he said slowly:

"She was nae conscious, and her clothes were tairn to pieces and hangin' in ribands. Such clothes as she had on, puir lassie! Her feeties were cut wi' the ice and the stones, and there was a terrible wound on her forehead and an ill faured queer bruise on one shoulder."

"Was your wife alone in the house when you returned?"

"Nae, there was maybe half a dozen men frae the town, who had heard of the lassie and had coom to help the search. They set up a shout when they saw us, and I had one of them fire his revolver to tell the others Miss Page was wi' us."

"Did they show any emotion at the sight of Miss Page's condition?" asked Langdon, and a little shudder shook Mrs. Page, who alone of all those present knew of the tragedy to which that "emotion" had led. MacPherson's voice, too, was grim as he said:

"I wouldna call it 'emotion,' but there was a gude bit of murmurin' against those who had driven so sweet a lassie distractit and sent her to maybe her death in the snow. The murmurin' grew louder when they saw the hurt and there were cries to know who had done it. When Mr. Langdon told them, the murmurs grew louder and finally one of the lads cried out in a loud voice, 'This town has na room for wifebeaters and drunken brutes—he ought to be hung."

A stir of excitement swept through the court-room, for MacPherson, without a gesture, with no more than a rising inflection of his voice, had brought before them a vision of the snowy night and the little house from whose doorway the lamplight streamed out, mellowing the snow to gold, and touching with its fingers of light the grim faces of that group of men stirred to the deep anger of the mob at the thought of Dan Page's brutality.

"Did the other men make any threats?"

"Aye. Another one of them cried oot, 'Killin' is too good fer Dan Page. He should be horsewhipped out of town.' At that, my wife coom up to me and says, 'For the lassie's sake, don't let them be takin' the law into their oon hands or there'll be murder done this nicht.' So I cried 'Dinna take the matter too personal, lads—we've law and a gaol in this town. Somebody get the sheriff.'"

"Did they heed you?"

"I couldna tell at the time, because just then a cutter comes dashin' oop with twa men in it, and one shouts oot, 'Have you found Mary Page?' And they all answers, 'Yes, she's found!' Then he says, 'I'm James Pollock—her fiance—and I have come to take her home.'"

"Was Miss Page still unconscious?" The question came sharply. MacPherson shook his head.

"Nae, she was conscious, and when she heerd him she gave a cry of 'No, no, no!' and dragged hersel' up from where she lay and clung to Mr. Langdon. At that the man Pollock pushit by me and cried, 'Mary! Mary—I have come to take you home.'"

"Did Miss Page answer him?"

"Nae, she just shookit her head, and Mr. Langdon said, 'Miss Page is not going home yet.' But Mr. Pollock was sair angry and shouted, 'What the devil have you got to do with it? Haven't you made trouble enough?'"

"Did Mr. Pollock make any move toward Miss Page?"

"Aye. He tookit a quick step forward like he would carry her off, but the gude wife stoppit him. 'Ye'll na move the puir lassie till she is warm and restit,' she said, and put her arms aboot her and tookit her into the bedroom beyant. Mr. Langdon helpit her, and when he came oot he said, 'Miss Page will not return to her drunken father. My friend Dr. Jamison and his wife will give her temporary shelter and the proper medical attention.'"

"Did Mr. Pollock acquiesce?" Langdon's voice was dry with reminiscences.

"Mr. Pollock was sair angry, and he said, 'It is not for you to say what my future wife shall do. I'll not have her put with your friends. She shall go home with me—I can protect her from her father. I suppose you think you can carry her right off under my nose. Well, let me tell you that's called by an ugly name!' At that Mr. Langdon shouts, 'What do you mean, Jim Pollock? Tell me what you mean by that!' He lookit so fierce I feared a fight, so I went between them and said, 'Dinna fash yersels like that. Think of the puir lassie—and be quiet.' Then I says to Mr. Pollock, 'Ye'll gang outside a bit and when the lassie is restit, I'll let ye know.'"

"Did Mr. Pollock go then?"

"Aye, for I went wi' him to the door mysel'."

"Were the men still outside?"

"Na, and it gi' me a shock like, for I cude see na one exceptit the friends of Mr. Pollock. The ithers had all slippit awa' towards the town."

"Did you speak of their absence when you re-entered the cabin?"

"Na, for I had ither matters to make clear. I had made up ma mind that it

"I can protect her from her father."

was na with Mr. Pollock that the lassie should go, so I pit it tae Mr. Langdon, that wi' my horse in the sleigh, we cude carry the lassie out the door to the kitchen and drive off, leavin' the gude wife to tell the ithers."

"Did you carry this plan out?"

"Aye. We fillit the sleigh with blankets, and I pit my shot-gun in the front and we helpit the lassie oot—"

"Will you tell us please," broke in the Judge with some asperity, "what you expected to do with a shot-gun?" And a little twinkle sparkled for an instant in MacPherson's eyes.

"Mr. Pollock was in an automobile," he said, "and shot is a grand thing for tires. Nae doot you can guess yoursel' how much chance they have to escape it."

A ripple of laughter swept through the room, instantly hushed at the warning frown of the Judge, and MacPherson, his huge brown hands gripped about the edge of the stand, turned inquiringly towards Langdon.

"Will you tell us, Mr. MacPherson, as briefly as possible, what occurred while you were on your way to the residence of Dr. Jamison?"

"We had na mair than got startit when the noise of the horse brought one of Pollock's friends to the corner of the house to look oop the back road. At sight of us he gave a cry and ran back, shoutin' to Mr. Pollock. * * * We had a fair getaway, but na horse is as gude as one of those devil machines, and they were after us at once. So I tookit the reins and give them to Mr. Langdon and said, 'You drive, and pit the lassie doon. I've a way of stoppin' them as is behin', but I need my hands.' At thot I tookit my gun and stude up in the sleigh. I cude see the ithers plainly, and I shoutit, 'Go back, unless ye want to be hurtit!' But they only swore at me, and when I saw they were gainin' I sent a load of shot towards them. It did na harm, but they stoppit short, tae see if there was hurt. 'They'll na coom after us again the nicht,' I said; but it was no mair than a few minutes before Mr. Langdon said, 'I hear the motor!' And I said, 'There's anither barrel to the gun.'"

It was a strange scene that he drew for them in his deep, quiet voice—a scene so unreal that it was incredible to most of those present that it could all have happened not so very many miles from the court-room where they now sat—a scene with the dark, snowy road and the silent woods for its setting, with the flying sleigh speeding almost noiseless over the slippery road. Langdon, his face white and set with fatigue and anxiety holding the tugging reins in one hand while the other arm held close the half-conscious form of Mary, her bandaged head ghastly above the enwrapping blankets; while over them towered the grim figure of the great Scotchman, his shot-gun to his shoulder, his big body swaying with the speed of the flying sleigh.

"I waited till they came oop too close," he finished, a deep note throbbing in his voice, "and then I did fer a tire wi' the second shot. The auto nigh upset wi' the force of the explosion, and they all jumpit oot. And that was the last we saw of them."

"Did you remain at Dr. Jamison's house when you reached there?"

"Na. For when I had seen the puir lassie taken away by the kind gude wife of the doctor, and I knew she were safe, I keepit thinkin' of how fast the men had gone fra the hoose that nicht, and I says to Mr. Langdon, 'I will jes' take a run back to the town. I'm thinkin', and we're sure there's na harm coom to Dan Page through this nicht's work.' And Mr. Langdon says, quick like, 'What do you mean?' So I told him and the doctor, and Mr. Langdon was all fer comin' wi' me, but the doctor wouldna let him. 'Dinna fash yersel',' I said, when I saw the doctor was richt. 'I'll gae fast, and if there is need fer you I'll come richt back.' And the doctor said, 'You're all worn out, Philip. You've got to have some rest. Be sensible.' So I went back alone."

"At what hour did you reach the home of Miss Page?"

"I dinna ken the exact hour, but it were aboot daylight, and I cude see quite a ways ahead of me."

"Will you tell us, please, what you saw when you approached the Page house?"

Slowly one great hand clinched itself into a knotted fist, and the muscles of his jaw tightened, and across those who sat between, the gray eyes of the Scotchman and the tear-dimmed eyes of Mrs. Page met in a mute communion of terrible memories. Then, slowly, with a new tone of suppressed excitement lending a thrill to his voice he said:

"When I got nie enough to see the hoose, I cude see a great black splotch in front of it, that I made oot to be men. Then I cude hear shouts: 'Come oot, Dan Page, we've summat to say to you!' So I didna drive right oop to the place. I stoppit in the road and crepit through the wood at the back and, hiding under the hedge, got oop to the rear. Then I wrote on a wee scrap of paper, 'I've news of Mary—and I come to bring help.' Then I tappit on a window, till I saw Mrs. Page peerin' oot—and I held up the paper.

"After a minute or so she unlatchit the back door and I slippit in. 'Oh, Mr. MacPherson,' says the puir lady, cryin', 'is my girl safe?' And I says, 'Safe and sound asleep.' And she says, 'Thank God.' Then I heerd another voice sayin', 'Annie, Annie—who is it? Don't let them get me—oh, my God, don't let them get me!' And I saw that Dan Page was hidin' behind her, clingin' to her skirts like a scared bairn. His face were all drawn and twistit like, and his mouth was slobberin', and he kept cryin', 'I was drunk—I was drunk! You tell them, Annie—You tell them!' At that she says like one speakin' to a child, 'There, there, Dan—you're safe!' And then there came an awfu' cry from ootside: 'Come oot, Dan Page—or we'll smoke ye oot like the beast that ye are!' At that Mrs. Page began to sob and says, 'Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do! They will na talk to me—and they'll burn oor hoose, they'll burn oor hoose! Oh, if Philip were only here!'

"'Dinna greet,' I said, 'I'll get him, but he mun ha' time. Let Dan Page go upstairs and talk to them from a window.'

"'Oh, Dan,' says the puir lady, 'Dan—will you do that? Tell them you didn't mean to hurt Mary or—or me.' 'No, no,' he whimpered, 'I can't, I can't!' But I grabbit him by the arm and pulled him to his feet. 'Be a man,' I cried, and I shookit him. 'Be a man and get you upstairs.'

"'You'd be safe in the cupola, Dan,' says Mrs. Page. 'I'll stay with you—and this kind man will go for Philip.' But he kept sayin', 'No, no,' and I could hear the others bangin' at the door and I dared not stay, so I slippit oot the way I came and went off for Mr. Langdon."

Mrs. Page, whose anxiety to be near Mary had kept her from returning to the witness room, shuddered at the memories that MacPherson was conjuring up out of the past. The softness which time has lent the tragedy of that chill winter morning was stripped off, exposing the old horrible wound, and she could feel again those groping fingers, icy cold, clutching at her as she strove to drag Dan Page up stairs towards the cupola.

She could hear his voice, now thick with drink, now athrill with terrible fear—as he pleaded with her to hide him and to save him. She had been mercifully numb with the horror of it then; consumed only with the desire to hold those men at bay long enough for MacPherson to bring help, and it was that desire which gave her the strength to drag the heavy bulk of her husband up the two flights of stairs into the little cupola at the top.

She could feel again the sting of the cold dawn wind against her face as she stepped out on the platform of rough boards and dropped the inert figure of her husband at her feet.

Then with all the eloquence of her great fear she had pleaded with the mob below to go away. They had seemed all eyes floating on a great pool of blackness against the snow as she looked down, but later she could see the grim mouths below the eyes and knew that her pleas were falling on deaf ears.

Finally one who seemed to be the ringleader had stepped forward and cried:

"Where is your husband? It is he that we want to talk to." And she had lied and said, "He is sleeping."

They muttered ominously at that and again the ringleader spoke: "We have no quarrel with you, Mrs. Page, but no drunkard who strikes his daughter and drives her insane shall stay in this town—Dan Page has got to go."

"He will, he will," she promised wildly. "I'll take him away today. He didn't mean to hurt us—he didn't know what he was doing— But he'll go away,—oh, I promise that." And again the grim voice answered her:

"He'll go, but WE'LL see him off. Let him stand up like a man and talk to us."

At that they all took up the shout for Page, and he, lying on his face on the boards, moaned and prayed to the God he had long forgotten, to save him.

How long she talked and urged and wept and pleaded Mrs. Page herself did not remember, but somehow she had held them—still threatening—still ominous—till far down the road she saw a small speck that she knew was an approaching sleigh with two figures in it.

At sight of it she had forgotten everything except an infinite relief, and crying in her joy had sped down stairs, leaving Dan Page still huddled in the windy cupola.

If she hadn't—she shuddered, and caught her breadth in a smothered sob, and for a moment the court-room hung in a haze before her and the voice of MacPherson speaking on the witness-stand receded to a vast distance and seemed to be again the murmuring voices of that angry mob. But she fought back the impending faintness and the rising tears, and as one bracing himself against the impact of some great weight, she straightened her slender shoulders to meet without flinching the story of that morning's tragedy.

"When Mr. Langdon and I drove oop," MacPherson was saying, "the men were still there, and Mr. Langdon stood oop in the sleigh and made a speech to them urging them to go home quietly. 'Miss Page is safe in the hands of a good doctor,' he said, 'and you will only make a bad matter worse if you attempt to carry out this plan of whipping Dan Page out of town. I'll see to it that he leaves the community, but if you drive him out this way, it's going to mean disgrace to the town and to Mary Page, too. Do you suppose she could bear the thought of her father's having been publicly whipped?' 'Well,' shouted one of the men, ''tis not beatin' her the way he has done it— Drivin' her and—the brute!' And the crowd began to murmur again. Then Mr. Langdon told them that the drink was like a ragin' beast inside Mr. Page, that he knew nought of what he did; that he probably didn't remember anything—that he really loved his wife and his girl. And while he was talkin' one of the men gave a cry and pointit oop, and there in the cupola stood Dan Page—wild like the daft, clingin' to the rail, and he cried oot, 'What he says is God's truth. I love my wife and girl as much as you men love yours— It's whiskey that hurt them—not me. I've been a slave in the grip of a fiend all my life. I've tried—my God, men, I've tried—to keep away from it—but it gets me. The sight of it—the smell of it—the taste of it—is ever in my mind. I drink because I must, and drink more to drown the memory of it! I've lived in hell for years, and no horsewhipping could punish me—as does the knowledge of this night's work.' Then suddenly he burst out cryin'—sobbin' like a child, while the men stood starin' oop at him. Then he flung out his arm and said, 'Philip—take care of them—be careful of Pollock—I'm going to take myself out of the community—now.' And at thot he leapit oop onto the rail and jumped."

MacPherson broke off abruptly, and his hand shook as he wiped the drops of sweat off his forehead—and the shudder that gripped him swept through the entire room at the thought of that body hurtling through the air down upon the snow to stain it with that swiftly flowing stream of crimson.

"Was Mr. Page killed instantly?"

Only Mrs. Page sat erect and unmoved, but her eyes were pools of an agony too deep for expression.

"Was Mr. Page killed instantly?"

"Yes, he was dead when we pickit him oop, and the men spread their coats over him and carried him to the hoose."

"Did you go into the house with them?"

"No," said MacPherson, "as well ye know, sir, I tookit you back to the doctor's hoose."

Langdon smiled a little. "It's not what I know, but what I want you to tell the court, Mr. MacPherson; so will you please tell them, as succinctly as possible, what occurred upon your return to the residence of Dr. Jamison?"

"It were the gude wife of the doctor that met us, and toldit us that the doctor had Miss Page in his laboratory making some tests about the brain."

"The doctor had already said that he had been making some special tests for the brain," Langdon's voice rasped sharply through the room. "Did he make the results of those tests known in your presence?"

"He said, 'She is sane now, and these tears will relieve her, but I would advise you to have Dr. Foster, the alienist, make an examination. She has still much to suffer, and—this thing will come back!— You'll have to take good care of her and guard her, Philip.'"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]